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POINT OF VIEW

Lodge's Return Opens Sores

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After watching Presidents Kennedy and Johnson from close up, McGeorge Bundy, the White House assistant for national security affairs, has remarked: "A politician's life is like a bull-fighter's. The bull can get him any day."

And whether they know it or not, a lot of people, including Johnson, risk being politically hurt by the appointment of Henry Cabot Lodge.

Lodge's Republicanism is not going to deter future attacks on American policy in Viet Nam by hardliners such as Republican Reps. Melvin R. Laird and Gerald Ford, who are going to be guided by their concept of the national interest and not by the political affiliation of the ambassador in Saigon.

Lodge's second tour there as ambassador is going to open a lot of political sores not just in Viet Nam's body politic but inside this administration.

In Viet Nam, the appointment has caused dismay among the numerically important Cao Dai religious sect (a mixture of Eastern and

Western religions), the Hoa Hao (a violently anti-Communist religious sect), and the Catholics.

Radical Buddhists, who are feared and disliked by the overwhelming majority of orthodox Buddhists in the Delta, are led by the militant Thich Tri Quang whose Buddhist youth gave Lodge a flattering sendoff when he first left Saigon.

They had good reason to be grateful to Lodge. It was the ambassador who gave Thich Tri Quang asylum in the last days of the Diem regime—only to have the militant monk play a pivotal role, and defy Washington's wishes, in toppling three subsequent U.S.-supported governments.

In recent months, Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara reportedly has said to his own staff, among others, that "the haven afforded to the radical Buddhist leader Thich Tri Quang may be one of the greatest mistakes this country ever made in Viet Nam."

Even if Secretary Dean Rusk keeps a stiff upper lip, most of the State Department regards Lodge's appointment

as the return of an administrative nightmare.

In Saigon last time he was free wheeling and divisive. He feuded with other members of the U.S. mission such as Gen. Paul Harkins. He disrupted morale by leaking stories to the press condemning close and loyal associates such as John Richardson, the Central Intelligence Agency chief who, as a result, was recalled.

And if Johnson doubts the source of the anti-Richardson leak, let him check with his good friend John McCone, former CIA director who has investigated the matter rather thoroughly.

And Lodge's lack of ability to galvanize the post-Diem military junta is legendary. According to one writer: "When it turned out that Minh (the junta leader) was stalling his country to the ground to the benefit of the Viet Cong, Lodge was fresh out of policy."

Unfortunately, these are only a few of the reasons for wondering whether Lodge's appointment may not boomerang.

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